

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS VATICAN 000475

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE (LEVIN); EUR/PPD; INR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: BENEDICT XVI: LOOKING AHEAD TO THE NEW PONTIFICATE - PART ONE

REF: A) VATICAN 0467; B) 04 VATICAN 3196; C) VATICAN 0463; D) VATICAN 0465; E)

VATICAN 0466

1. (U) This cable is the first of a series previewing the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. It examines the factors behind Benedict XVI's election and the implications of this choice for the Holy See. Subsequent cables will examine the approach the new Pope is likely to take on international issues, his leadership style, and the dynamics of his management of the Curia.

-----  
Summary  
-----

2. (SBU) Although cardinals cannot discuss details of conclave voting, the brevity of the conclave that produced Pope Benedict XVI suggests broad agreement among the College of Cardinals as to what they wanted in a pope: continuity with the papacy of Pope John Paul II, theological orthodoxy, and an older candidate who would not reign as long as the late pope. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's image as a stern doctrinal watchdog among some Western media did not in the end sway the cardinals, who were more influenced by his reassuring performance at Pope John Paul II's funeral and in his open and efficient direction of the cardinals' pre-conclave meetings.

3. (SBU) In choosing the name Benedict, a patron saint of Europe, the new pope signaled his desire to focus sharply on the future of Catholicism in his home continent. He also harkened back to Pope Benedict XV, who worked for peace and reconciliation during his 1914-1922 papacy. Despite this Euro-centric focus, Benedict XVI would not have been elected without demonstrating interest in and attention to the developing world. It was no coincidence that he granted one of his first audiences to bishops from Latin America, where he has work to do to salve some of the disappointment that a pope was not selected from this most Catholic of regions accounting for 43 percent of the world's Catholics. End Summary.

-----  
Why Elect Benedict XVI?  
-----

4. (SBU) The brevity of the conclave that elected Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as the 265th pope suggests generally broad agreement among cardinals as to what the Catholic Church needs at this moment in history. According to several cardinals, Benedict XVI was elected because he was a man of "great theological ability, linguistically gifted, kindly of manner, and of enormous pastoral and administrative experience" who will be "his own man and bring his own great gifts to the papacy, to the Church and the world." Electors were also motivated by a desire for continuity with the historic pontificate of Pope John Paul II, theological orthodoxy, and an older candidate who would not reign as long as the late pope. Such characteristics will allow the slow-moving Church machinery to digest the changes and new directions of the third longest pontificate in history, gradually sort out what it wants to retain or reject, and defend its key doctrinal priorities while positioning the church for the future.

-----  
Homily a Sign of Unity  
-----

5. (SBU) The day before the conclave opened, Benedict XVI had delivered a homily to cardinals that was generally interpreted as a stern diatribe against ills in the Church and society. In that homily he argued that secularism and anti-Catholic ideologies were a threat to the faith and unity of the Church, and warned against a "dictatorship of relativism." In recent decades, Ratzinger said, the Catholic Church has been "thrown from one extreme to the other: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertarianism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism, and so on. Every day new sects arise." Some observers suggested it was Ratzinger's final clarion call for his conservative views before he rode off to the Bavarian sunset

of his retirement. In fact, although those close to the new pope told us Pope Benedict wrote the homily himself, it may well have crystallized many of the points that came up in the daily pre-conclave meetings that followed the funeral of John Paul II. These pre-conclave meetings also gave the cardinals a chance to evaluate Ratzinger, who ran the meetings, and, by many accounts, showed himself in those days to be the leader the cardinals were

looking for. Rather than a shout in the wind, the homily may well have been received as a call to action among cardinals and proof to them that the German could be the man to carry this tough message.

-----  
Ratzinger's Advantage  
-----

16. (SBU) Ratzinger had one big advantage going in: in his 23-year Vatican career, he had met with literally thousands of bishops and cardinals from all over the world. Aside from his own travels, Ratzinger's Vatican dicastery (department) was a required stop for all bishops coming to Rome for their quinquennial visitations. Many cardinals may have felt not only that they knew Ratzinger, but also that he was familiar with their local ecclesiastical problems. The question for many may have been the extent to which the stern watchdog image of Ratzinger popular in the media -- and perhaps shared by some prelates -- would prejudice perceptions of Ratzinger as Pope. Even those cardinals in step with Ratzinger on the issues might have worried about a public relations backlash with the election of a pope seen as authoritarian and even repressive.

17. (SBU) Two factors helped carry Benedict through. First, as some commentators have subsequently pointed out, the ogre-image of the German cardinal was always much stronger in the U.S., Canada, and parts of Western Europe than it was in the rest of the world. But even there, Ratzinger was not widely known among average Catholics. Elsewhere, Catholics would not likely have been deterred by his orthodox image: the Church in Africa, for example, is often more conservative theologically than the Church in much of the U.S. and Europe. Second, when given a world stage at Pope John Paul II's funeral, Ratzinger delivered with a moving, heartfelt homily that showed those who knew him only from the media a different side of his persona. The funeral homily seems to have cemented this impression of compassionate, open leadership at the pre-conclave meetings, dispelling remaining doubts among electors.

18. (SBU) It is also likely that Ratzinger benefited from the lack of a clear favorite among other contenders, divisions among regional groups from Latin America and Italy, which failed to unite around a candidate, and pressure to come to a quick result so as to avoid the appearance of division within the Church. There had been much speculation before the conclave about the possibility of a pope from the developing world, but nothing ever materialized. Ratzinger may have revealed one reason for this a few years ago in an interview, when he noted that in times of crisis, the Church took refuge in its European identity. While not a full-blown crisis, the Church faced a great challenge in choosing a leader to follow a hugely popular and long-serving pontiff. Ratzinger's supporters succeeded in developing a sense of inevitability prior to the conclave, given this dynamic. In the end he was a safe and secure -- though hardly a bold -- choice for a cautious College uncertain about or unwilling to move the Church in a new direction.

-----  
What's in a Name?  
-----

19. (SBU) As noted previously (ref a), Ratzinger's choice of a papal name points clearly to his hopes for a reinvigorated Church in Europe that recognizes its Christian roots. St. Benedict is one of the patrons of Europe, and Benedictine monasticism was a key vehicle for the spread of Christianity on the continent. In his first general audience April 27, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized this point, and went on to call Benedict a "fundamental point of reference for the unity of Europe and a powerful call to the irrefutable Christian roots of European culture and civilization."

110. (SBU) Pope Benedict XVI also made reference that day to his World War I era predecessor, Benedict XV (1914-22), saying that he had also chosen the name to link himself to that "true and courageous prophet of peace." Benedict XV had "struggled... bravely, first to avoid the drama of war, and then to limit its terrible consequences," according to the new pope. "In his footsteps," Benedict XVI continued, "I place my ministry, in the service of reconciliation and harmony between peoples, profoundly convinced that the great good of peace is a fragile and precious gift to be safeguarded with everyone's contribution." Benedict XV placed great emphasis on putting the

Church in order, and was responsible for the introduction of a

new Code of Canon Law. He also encouraged the reinvigoration of missionary efforts in the third world, particularly in Asia. Ratzinger was clearly aware of and hopes to embrace this entire legacy in choosing his papal name.

-----  
A Focus on Europe, and Beyond  
-----

11. (SBU) Benedict XVI's anticipated focus on Europe is no surprise to those who have followed his career. He supported Pope John Paul II's recent and unsuccessful campaign to include a reference to the Christian roots of Europe in the EU constitution, and has often written of Europe's Christian heritage. As Cardinal Ratzinger, the new pope made widely reported comments critical of Turkey's potential admission to the European Union (ref b). Although the interview was more nuanced than reported, it nevertheless served as another example of Benedict's jealous -- and some might argue -- exclusivist attention to his home continent. Despite this Eurocentric orientation, those close to the new pope say he also has a broader vision of the Church, and they expect to see Benedict XVI both battle secularism in the United States and other Western nations, while giving due attention to the developing world.

-----  
The Developing World  
-----

12. (SBU) Although some Catholics who had been expecting -- or at least hoping for -- a pope from Latin America or elsewhere in the developing world were disappointed by Benedict's election, the new pope made it clear during the pre-conclave meetings that the developing world was on his radar screen. Among other gestures, he made a point of asking for detailed presentations on issues facing different parts of the developing world as cardinals pondered the future of the Church. Reports indicate that Third World cardinals were heartened by this attention, and subsequently became more supportive of the Ratzinger candidacy. Comments from leaders in the developing world have been generally positive following Benedict's election. Once elected, Benedict XVI wasted no time in addressing Latin American issues, meeting with members of CELAM, the Latin American Bishops Conference on April 28. CELAM officials have proposed holding a general assembly in Rome of Latin American and Caribbean prelates, something that had been given initial approval by Pope John Paul II before his death. Benedict's decision is still pending.

13. (SBU) Going ahead with such a meeting could help Benedict establish his developing world credentials. Other Curial officials have told us of their hopes for an early papal trip to Latin America -- perhaps to Mexico or Brazil. Until now, Ratzinger's most lasting legacy in Latin America was his crackdown, with John Paul II, on liberation theology. But don't expect Benedict to lavish attention on the developing world simply to spruce up his image, or as a consolation prize to those who wanted to see a different face in the Vatican. An American Monsignor who has worked with Ratzinger for several years told us recently that Benedict XVI will certainly pay attention to the Third World, but not for its public relations value. "He only does something once he's convinced that logically it's the right thing to do," our contact insisted. In this case, he sees that the developing world warrants attention. With the Church in Latin America leaking believers at a steady rate, and various social and theological challenges facing the growing Church in Africa and that in Asia, Benedict will keep these regions on the front burner, notwithstanding his European concerns.

-----  
Comment  
-----

14. (SBU) The generally positive reaction to the election of Benedict XVI by cardinals, bishops, and Vatican officials suggests both broad agreement over his election and a desire to project unity in the wake of an epochal leadership change. In fact, the cardinals have flooded the media after the election to help shape the public image of the new pontiff. Although no cardinal or Vatican official would publicly express disappointment over the result of the conclave, many prelates

have gone out of their way to praise the choice, including some from the more liberal wing of the Church. When one witnesses groups of younger clergy cheering Benedict XVI with abandon, as we saw at his inaugural mass, it becomes clear that the new pontiff has strong support of the Roman hierarchy and Rome-based clergy. As he reaches out to Europe and the developing world and addresses the many issues facing the Church, Benedict will find out if this Curial backing translates into similar support from clergy and religious personnel -- and more critically from lay Catholics -- elsewhere in the world.

HARDT

NNNN

2005VATICA00475 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED